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consumption of meals has to be fitted. Among primitive peoples, these facts stand out more clearly perhaps than in our own.

To the Bemba the meal is, in a sense, the climax of the day. Cooking is a long and tedious process, as will be seen (Chap. V). The whole series of activities involved in fetching fuel, drawing water, preparing flour and collecting relish must be begun afresh each day, and can be reckoned to take at least 3 hours out of that day. But the time and nature of the meal is fixed by the type of agricultural work in hand.[1] This fact accounts for two of the chief characteristics of Bemba eating custom: the concentration on a single daily meal, and the irregularity of that meal. Although the Bemba may take some snack in the early morning such as cold *ubwali* left over from the night before, or some sweet potatoes or ground-nuts, it is quite impossible for the women to prepare a dish of porridge and relish more than once a day unless they are free from other work. Men and women are accustomed to go to their gardens in the early morning to do the bulk of their work on what we habitually describe as 'an empty stomach'. They return to the village at about noon, when the whole community waits for the evening meal. This habit of eating late in the day seems to have become fixed. Natives working in European employment tend to keep to it. Loaded carriers seem to prefer to walk their daily fifteen miles or so before eating, and labourers on European farms usually do the morning shift, from 6 a.m. to noon, without a 'breakfast'. In at least one Mission school, where the young native teachers were offered food before morning classes, they refused, saying they would not be able to work properly if they ate so early in the day. It is difficult to know whether such preferences are due entirely to habit, or whether the type of meal eaten by the Bemba actually takes a long time to digest. It is interesting to note that the compound managers of the copper mines at the Roan Antelope and Mufulira considered that the natives worked better if they had eaten a breakfast before going on shift, and made this practice compulsory, but the meal was not the heavy porridge in this case, but cocoa and white bread.

This concentration on a single meal is a habit to which the children are only accustomed gradually. Bemba infants, as we saw, are suckled whenever they wish, and in early childhood they eat all day long if possible. Natives recognize that small children

[1] Cf. pp. 73, 104 and Chap. XVIII.

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cannot go so long without food as their elders and cook them extras when they can. Women who stay at home in the village all morning roast ground-nuts for the little children, or bake them sweet potatoes in season, while all the young people forage for what they can get from various relatives, or look for fruits in the bush. Mothers going to work may be seen carrying smouldering embers on a bark holder, ready to make small fires to roast maize cobs if they happen to be ripe in the gardens. But when food is short the children have to go without and expect to do so, and as they reach adolescence they begin to adopt the tribal belief that it is childish and undignified to be eating at all hours of the day. They finally express the ordinary adult preference for a meal late in the day rather than early. Some natives comment half disparagingly on the frequency of the white man's meals, although of course they admire the riches of a European who is constantly able to entertain his friends. The white man, chiefly the government official in this area, has now become a standardized figure in a series of folk-tales, and in these he is always represented as stopping constantly in the middle of any activity to take breakfasts or to drink tea. I once listened to some small boys playing at being Europeans—a very favourite game. The boy who was acting as the district officer sat lounging in an imitation chair made of branches and bark rope and repeatedly called, 'Bring food'. At last one of his fellows, acting servant, said aside in an aghast whisper, 'You can't ask for food again. We've only just brought it to you.' The 'white man's' answer was immediate. 'You know nothing about Europeans! That is just what they do all day—just sit and call, Boy! Bring me food.'

The chief meal of the Bemba varies tremendously both as to its time, its size, and the accessory foods that may be added to it during the day. These changes depend chiefly on the nature of the women's agricultural work from season to season, the monthly changes in the types of food available, and the time taken to cook them. For instance, at Pambalasa village (September 1930), the women were working late into the day to finish piling the branches for burning in their gardens. They were back late to the village, and got the single meal ready at about five. There was no early morning snack for most of them. At Candamukulu's village (April 1931), the women were harvesting, but at this time of the year the maize was ripe, and a few cobs could be quickly roasted at about 8 a.m. as well as the evening meal, which varied in individual cases

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CHAPTER VI

THE ROUTINE OF HOUSECRAFT

Housework.

512 COOKING is an occupation which has to be fitted into a seasonal as well as a daily routine. The Bemba housewife has to cleanse and tidy her hut and look after her children, as well as prepare the daily meals with all the accessory activities which this implies. Over and above, she is responsible, in this particular tribe, for more than half of the agricultural work of the year, and therefore the time she has free for cooking varies from month to month.

342 The actual housework of the Bemba woman does not fill so large a proportion of her time as that of a European woman. She has, to begin with, fewer material possessions and a smaller house.[1] Her hut is usually round without windows, and closed with a single door. On one side of the door is the fire-place with its 352 three fire-stands and the drying rack above it. Opposite is the bed, a reed mat stretched across a tiny platform raised off the floor. Besides this, she has cooking vessels stacked round the wall, a blanket and one or two garments, and her husband's axe, spear, or bow. The hut itself is not 'lived in' in our sense of the word, 342 except in wet weather. Natives sit and talk on their verandas or in the men's shelters and usually dance outside. The Bemba's house is therefore a kitchen and a bedroom only, and on special occasions a place where beer drinks are held. To tidy and clean an African hut is therefore a simple job compared with the work of a European woman in charge of a three- or four-roomed house, and living possibly in the smoky atmosphere of a town.

356 Nevertheless, some housework has to be done. The interior of a Bemba hut looks dirty at first glance. The smoke of the fire blackens the rafters of the roof. Dust and fragments accumulate on the floor, which has not the hard surface of the cow-dung cement used, for instance, in Nyasaland. There are no shelves or

[1] From measurements taken of 11 huts the average wall height was 6 ft. 1 in. and the diameter 14 ft. 2 in. The biggest hut measured, that of a chief, had a wall height of 8 ft. 4 in. and a diameter of 17 ft. The more modern type of hut built in this area is rectangular.

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place each night. Boys build houses for themselves in twos or threes.

Life is lived almost entirely in the open, on the verandas or on the ground in front of each house, and the doors are rarely closed by day. Each villager can see or hear most of what goes on next door in a community of an average size, i.e. of 30 to 50 huts. The Bemba even prepare their food as far as possible in the open—one of the most important sanctions for their particular system of distribution, as we shall see. Strolling through the village late in the afternoon the European will notice little groups of women and girls working together at different tasks. Two women may be grinding side by side at one grindstone, while others have carried their mortars to the door of the same hut and are pounding their grain in unison. On another veranda a group of young girls are shelling nuts, while the leaves for a vegetable stew are being cut and stalked by an older householder. Two grandmothers may be squatting by the fire stirring the porridge, while babies from various households are scrambling in and out of the hut on the lookout for tit-bits. Little girls between 8 and 12 belonging to different families come into the room to beg for something to cook on their own fires, and retire, laughing and talking, to miniature fire-places at the back of the veranda. Young matrons come in and out to borrow pots or a pinch of snuff—there is, in short a constant coming and going of women from hut to hut, while the boys and men of the different families are somewhere in the distance. Even the head of a household, returning from work, will not linger in his hut while cooking is in progress, but will stoop to enter the door, throw his spear silently on the bed and go off to wait elsewhere.

The division of the porridge each evening is an impressive sight in a big hut, and shows at a first glance that the catering far exceeds the limits of a single household. The housewife, probably an old woman, squats on the floor in front of the fire with four or five small eating-baskets beside her. From the great steaming pot on the hearth she takes lump after lump of porridge on the stirrer and slowly, appraisingly, scrapes off the right amount into each receptacle. A ring of younger women and children watch the spoon intently as it hovers a moment above each basket, and later descends to smooth each portion of *ubwali* into round balls. Next the relish is divided into a motley collection

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any regular system of time intervals. The *umwaka* (plur. *imyaka*) is the name given to the complete cycle of climatic changes and economic processes which make up the year.[1] This is divided into thirteen months (*umueshi—imieshi*) which signifies moon, or the cycle of the moon (cf. table on p. 389). The names of these months are used with greater or less frequency according to the importance of the activities performed in them. The coming of each new moon is an important event in the people's life, since it affects very largely the tempo of ordinary activities. When the moon is full, laughter and talk go on late into the night and the drums sound for dancing. When the moon has waned, there is no other system of lighting and the people go early to bed. The days of full moon are also believed to be specially lucky and to be auspicious for the starting of any new activity. I noticed several times that the *bakabilo* of Citimukulu's court postponed important ritual acts, often at some practical inconvenience, until the nights were 'white, completely white' (*ukubuta tutu*), explaining in answer to my comment: 'We cannot work at such things in the dark' (*Teti tubombefyo mu mfifi*). The rhythm of the changing moons has thus a significance to the Bemba that it has lost in our society, and the appearance of the new crescent is greeted with delight and often with shouts from the children, but at the same time the calendar of months is rarely used as a method of calculating time or fixing the start of economic activities. Some months coincide with the change of season: *Shinde* (April), the change to the cold weather; *Lusuba lunono* (October), the beginning of the hot season; *Mpundu* (November), the coming of the rains and the time of the ripening of the *mpundu* fruit. In these cases the name of the month is used in daily conversation in planning activities. But in other cases the change of climate, i.e. windy season (*mpepo*) or the hot season (*ulusuba*) is referred to only, and there are several months in the year when, owing to the difficulties of working with a thirteen-months calendar, the ordinary native is not quite certain what the name of the particular moon should be.[2] The English child hardly notices changes in the moon, but learns to recite the months of the year

[1] The *umwaka* is a cycle of seasonal changes but it is never calculated by means of the stars, in which the Bemba seem to have little interest and never use as a means of reckoning time.

[2] In April 1934 I heard the chief's council discuss informally with the Paramount chief whether the moon that had just appeared was correctly *Kutumpu* or *Shinde*, and these learned men of the tribe took different sides on the question.

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larly four or five times a night in order to shift their positions on their hard wood beds.

Thus it can be said that the Bemba method of reckoning time allows them to fix dates to the nearest year, season, month, or nowadays week, but it does not subdivide day and night into equal intervals, and in fact most of their activities do not need to be co-ordinated more closely than to the nearest day or half day. The conception of the equal time interval does not seem to occur to them in the ordinary course of life. Their days and nights are not in fact of equal length as ours are, with our independence of seasonal changes in light, dark, and temperature, and our regular routine of work. Bemba rise at 5 a.m. in the hot weather, but come reluctantly from their huts at 8 or even later in the cold season, and their working day is fixed accordingly. Meals are timed to the nearest two hours rather than to the minute, and night begins at any time from 8 o'clock on a chilly dark evening to midnight or later when the moon is full, and the people are tempted to stay out in the open. Nor does the work-time interval which dominates our activities and calculations exist for them. We, after all, can hardly conceive of time except in terms of energy expenditure and, to many of us, a fixed money value as well. But the Bemba in his unspecialized society does different tasks daily and a different amount of work each day. The diary of men's and women's activities given in Table E shows that in Kampamba the men were employed on five quite separate occupations (hoeing, hunting, chasing locusts, fencing, carrying, &c.) in the course of ten days, and at Kasaka, though the main work was branch lopping, yet various ritual observances, visits from friends or Europeans, interrupted the daily routine constantly. Domestic needs tie the women to certain daily tasks in this, as in other communities, but even then their garden work varies greatly from day to day. The working hours also change in what seems to us a most erratic manner. In fact I do not think the people ever conceive of such periods as the month, week, or day in relation to regular work at all. The major agricultural tasks have to coincide with certain seasons and moons, and that is all. A man says he has to cut trees between such-and-such climatic changes, but not that he has so many hours of work to get through, and daily work, which has become from habit almost a physiological necessity to many Europeans, only occurs at certain times of the year. The whole bodily rhythm

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805 of the Bemba differs completely from that of a peasant in Western
512 Europe, let alone an industrial worker. For instance at Kasaka,
461 in a slack season, the old men worked 14 days out of 20 and the young men 7; while at Kampamba in a busier season, the men of all ages worked on an average 8 out of 9 working days. The average working day in the first instance was 2¾ hours for men and 2 hours gardening plus 4 hours domestic work for the women, but the figures varied from 0 to 6 hours a day. In the second case the average was 4 hours for the men and 6 for the women, and the figures showed the same daily variation.

805 All these observations as to the African's conception and use of time are important in studying the relationship of black and white. There is probably no aspect of life in which the habits of both differ so fundamentally, and in both cases these habits are rooted in childhood training and a particular economic system. The Bemba have a 'sense of time' contrary to the usual European view, and it is fitted to guide them in the organization of their own activities, but it is ill-adapted to new routines and new economic values. A study of village life, therefore, explains many of the reactions of the Bemba to regular European work, particularly that on the mines. It surely also accounts for their desertions in the early days of employment, the utter exhaustion sometimes seen in new recruits at the end of a day's work, and the sudden desire of even the fully acclimatized native to return to his village and 'rest'—perhaps also the complete inactivity of many of such men returned to their villages on holiday. From the point of view of food production, too, it may account for the apparent inability of most natives to plan their work to obtain the maximum results, to calculate the labour required for any particular job, and lastly, to answer coherently the questions of an inquiring European as to 'how long' it takes to make a garden or build a fence.

Time taken on Particular Tasks.

461 I have sometimes been asked to estimate the time a Bemba man
512 should spend each year in order to complete his necessary garden work. If this question could be answered precisely, the information would be extremely useful to those dealing with administrative problems such as the recruiting of native labour, the control of labour emigration, the optimum length of time natives should be encouraged to serve at the mines inside or outside the territory,

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and the means by which they should be enabled to come and go between mine and home. Unfortunately, however, the necessary figures are particularly difficult to give. The Bemba has, as has been seen, no 'normal working day' and no fixed size of garden which he aims to cut. In his particular working conditions there is a wide variation between the minimum time required for each task by a man working continuously at it, and the average time taken by natives working in their usual intermittent way and responsible for a number of different occupations—gardening, fishing, house-building, &c. The former figure could be estimated accurately I presume under experimental conditions: the latter could only be determined by a series of records of individuals' agricultural achievements in different villages all over the country during a period of at least a year. Notes on the time taken to cut a garden, fence, or hoe it by selected groups of natives, e.g. old, middle-aged, or young, polygamous, or monogamous, &c.—if kept by administrative officers or missionaries, would provide data for calculating the time usually spent on different agricultural tasks. Such figures I was not able to collect during the time I had available.

Another difficulty is to decide whether the time figures required are those giving the minimum amount of male labour necessary to use the land to the best advantage, or alternatively, that sufficient to produce the minimum requirements of each domestic group. The former figures could presumably be calculated at an agricultural research station, while the latter would have to be based on some kind of assessment of each family's nutritional needs. I have neither set of data at my disposal but give my own rough estimates of the average amount of male labour required for Bemba cultivation as a stimulus to further investigations. My figures are based on answers given by a number of informants to questions as to the time taken over particular tasks, together with personal observations taken in a few villages where I stayed long enough to watch the completion of different stages of garden work.

The most important tasks of the Bemba men are tree-cutting, fencing, and hoeing. Elderly natives estimate that they would take about one month working continuously to clear a good-sized garden. A polygamist would need about seven weeks, as he would make a big garden for his first wife and a smaller one for the second. But the younger native would probably not work so continuously, and would be more likely to spend six weeks making one garden.

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461 Men usually ask for three months' leave to 'make a garden', but most of them treat their time in the village as a holiday as well as
● 512 a gardening time. Thus it can be reckoned that for this, the most essential activity, the Bemba requires as a minimum four weeks' work, but usually takes two or three months a year interspersing this task with others.

Sowing millet is not a laborious process and a big garden can be planted in a day or two. Fencing, in those parts of the country where it is necessary, natives describe with rather a rare unanimity as the work of one month, thus making a minimum of two to three months' agricultural labour which can be done by men only.

Hoeing falls into a different category, both because this is a task that men and women do jointly, and also because there is every degree of individual variation in the amount done. To get good results a substantial amount of hoeing should be done, according to native theory, but to get some food out of the ground, surface hoeing only would be adequate (cf. pp. 303, 390). The main hoeing consists of the digging up of the old burnt gardens (*ifiti-meme*), but besides this, a man in a new village has to make new garden beds the first year, and should re-hoe the old completely every two or three years. He should weed Kaffir corn, burn the old legume stalks on the *mputa*, &c., for each of which tasks I have added one week. If labour is short or the people hungry, this last work is not done. I should estimate that the minimum of time a man should spend on hoeing and weeding would be one month, but to use the soil to the best advantage, two or three would be necessary, doing a little every day (cf. p. 308).

Other activities such as fishing, hunting, or handicrafts are sporadic, and probably the ordinary Bemba spends about a month a year all told on such work. To build a house would take a fortnight for a man working alone, but houses will last for three or four years.

221 To estimate the amount of male labour required annually, the
461 reader should turn to the table given on p. 315. He will realize
512 that each Bemba has three or four gardens to deal with annually, as well as his village beds. Thus the work can probably be listed as follows:

(*a*) Garden of present year to be cut = 4 weeks—during May-September.
Garden of present year to be fenced = 4 weeks—during February-March.

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(*b*) Garden of last year to be dug up for ground-nuts or other crop = 2 weeks—during August–October. 221 461

(*c*) Garden of three years ago to be burnt and prepared for third-year millet = 1 week—during August–October. 512

(*d*) Garden of four years ago to be dug into mounds for beans or other crops = 2 weeks—during October–January.

Total = 13 weeks as a bare minimum, of which 8 can only be done by male labour.

In the village beds the labour expended can be roughly estimated as follows:

(*e*) Digging of new village beds = 2 weeks—usually during December–February.

(*f*) Complete rehoeing of old beds = 3 weeks—usually during December–February.

Or light hoeing of old beds = 1 week—usually during September–February.

(*g*) Burning, weeding, &c. = 1 week—usually during September–October.

Total = 4–6 weeks.

The total time spent both in the main gardens and on the village beds could thus be reckoned as a minimum period of 17–19 weeks, of which 8 weeks—4 during the dry season and 4 during the wet—can only be done by men. Probably, however, under ordinary village conditions and combining other tasks such as house-building, fishing, &c., the Bemba usually take 4–5 weeks longer to produce the same results, making a total of 5–6 months' work.

How is the Bemba to find this amount of time under modern conditions of migratory labour? He can clearly not produce the optimum results from the soil, but merely the minimum amount of food which will keep his family from destitution. 221 512

From the agricultural point of view the difficulty of the Northern Rhodesia labour situation is the length of time for which the men go to the mines and their lack of facilities for getting back to their villages. Recruiting ceased in the area in 1930, and the men mostly make their way to the mines (300–500 miles) on foot, or by bicycle. The Rand mineworker signs up for an eleven months' contract usually, with his return passage home automatically deducted from 221 512 464

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his wages. But the Bemba has either to pay 35*s.* for a lorry passage home or he must bicycle or walk. The first is considered a prohibitive passage, except for the better-off native, and the second is only done when a man is really sick of the town and feels he must get home—say after two or three years or even longer. He cannot reasonably return every year for the three months' garden labour which we have reckoned as necessary with the present method of cultivation. However, it can be seen from the table on p. 315 that, if a man spent two years at home, he could make millet gardens and fence them in successive years. He could then spend two years at the mines, leaving his wife to plant the third-year millet. She would thus have some millet every year if her husband had facilities for returning again in the fourth year, but this is obviously only one of the minimum solutions described above. For an improved food-supply an alternative method to tree-cutting or greater ease of transport to and from the mines are required.

The Will to Work.

At the opening of this book I described Bemba diet as inadequate and variable, and their methods of gardening as primitive compared to those of their neighbours. In some of the succeeding chapters I have tried to account for the shortage in their annual and daily food-supply by describing the people's difficulties in preparing and producing different foodstuffs, or in their methods of handling, distributing, and storing them. We have still to ask one final question, and its answer is to be found scattered here and there throughout the book. Put crudely, it is the query which springs naturally to the mind of most Europeans living in this area, viz. 'If the Bemba go short of food so often, why don't they work a good bit harder and drink less beer?' Successive Government reports describe this tribe as 'poor agriculturists' or 'incorrigibly lazy',[1] and the traveller, gazing at ill-weeded gardens and broken-down fences, cannot resist the same type of comment. The average working day of a man has been estimated as only four hours, even though the women are undoubtedly overworked at certain seasons of the year, and I have given a good many facts to show

[1] e.g. the Government Report for Native Affairs, 1936, p. 47. 'Natives in this Province generally speaking strike one as singularly unenterprising and indeed downright lazy about the growing of foodstuffs.'